

# REPORTER

ILLINOIS LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

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# *The Illinois Library Association Reporter*

is a forum for those who are improving and reinventing Illinois libraries, with articles that seek to: explore new ideas and practices from all types of libraries and library systems; examine the challenges facing the profession; and inform the library community and its supporters with news and comment about important issues. The *ILA Reporter* is produced and circulated with the purpose of enhancing and supporting the value of libraries, which provide free and equal access to information. This access is essential for an open democratic society, an informed electorate, and the advancement of knowledge for all people.



## ON THE COVER

Dawn breaks over the newly renovated Indian Trails Public Library District building in Wheeling. This project, which included a renovation of the entire existing 46,000 square feet of library space and an addition of 15,000 new square feet, was designed by Chicago architecture firm product architecture + design. New features include The Launch Pad maker space, study rooms, a middle school area and a drive-up window. This library has come a long way since its founding in 1958 as the Wheeling Library with donations of books and funds solicited by the Wheeling Women's Club, housed in a 600-square-foot frame building. Learn more about this and other library architecture projects completed in 2017, beginning on page 4.

The Illinois Library Association is the voice for Illinois libraries and the millions who depend on them. It provides leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library services in Illinois and for the library community in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all. It is the eighth oldest library association in the world and the third largest state association in the United States, with members in academic, public, school, government, and special libraries. Its 3,000 members are primarily librarians and library staff, but also trustees, publishers, and other supporters.

The Illinois Library Association has four full-time staff members. It is governed by a sixteen-member executive board, made up of elected officers. The association employs the services of Strategic Advocacy Group for legislative advocacy. ILA is a 501(c)(3) charitable and educational organization.

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See ILA calendar for submission deadlines for the *ILA Reporter*. Copy should be submitted by email to [ila@ila.org](mailto:ila@ila.org). You are encouraged to include press-ready digital photos (300 p.p.i.) and graphics with your articles, which will be included on a space-available basis.

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# Library Buildings

# 2017

Libraries these days are no longer quiet bastions filled with books, if they ever were only that. Libraries today offer beautiful and comfortable common spaces, up-to-the-minute technology, features for children's and teen areas that take into account each age level's developmental needs, and elegant overall design that makes these institutions anchors in their communities. Take a tour through six library locations that underwent new construction, addition, or renovation in 2017.

# Indian Trails Public Library District



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Architect: product architecture + design

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Type of project: Renovation/expansion

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Total cost: \$14,400,000

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Service population: 67,000

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Library director: Brian Shepard

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## What people are saying:

“A beautiful library! The setting is comfortable and quiet with light and windows all around.”

“It is a wonderful adventure to use and explore the new library. It truly is a place for people of all ages to come together and to continue their lifelong learning”

“The space created for the younger kids is an excellent idea and will promote reading and learning at the same time. Such creativity and fun things to do that even adults will enjoy!”



Photo credits: McShane Fleming Studios

# Lillie M. Evans Library District



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Architect: Craig Wright and Associates

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Type of project: Expansion

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Total cost: \$929,632

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Service population: 4,007

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Library director: Beth Duttlinger

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## What people are saying:

“It really incorporates all that we love about our library—the cozy feel, the natural light, the great spaces—and the new meeting area—we love it!”



# Lincolnwood Public Library District



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Architect: product architecture + design

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Type of project: Renovation

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Total cost: \$5,250,000

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Service population: 12,590

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Library director: Su Reynders

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## What people are saying:

“This has got to be the most beautiful library I have ever been in! It’s just stunning.”

“The new library makes me insanely happy.”

“The library looks twice as big—so open and inviting.”

“Looks great, so modern and still warm and welcoming.”



Photo credits: McShane Fleming Studios

# Marcella Schneider Branch Library at Germantown Hills, Illinois Prairie District Public Library



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Architect: Dewberry

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Type of project: New construction

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Total cost: \$1,800,000

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Service population: 21,644

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Library director: Joel Shoemaker

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## What people are saying:

“Love the new Germantown Hills library. I was there today checking out shark books with my grandsons. They LOVE the train set.”

“The Germantown Hills branch is the best thing to happen to our community!”

“So happy to have our new, bigger, better Germantown Hills library—Thank you!”



Photo credits: Dave Huh

# Seeley G. Mudd Library, Northwestern University



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Architect: Flad Architects

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Type of project: Renovation

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Total cost: Not available

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Service population: 21,551 students  
3,134 faculty

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Library director: Sarah M. Pritchard

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## What people are saying:

“I really love the study space. It’s bright and airy, and has a lot of great features and study rooms.”

“Grad students are often running experiments overnight in the labs, and having Mudd open 24 hours, and near so many research buildings, is a huge improvement for this part of campus.”

“There are so many different types of study spaces and work areas. If I want to sit by myself for a couple of minutes, or work on a problem set with a group, I can find a place to get work done.”



Photo credits: AJ Brown Imaging



# Warrenville Public Library District



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Architect: product architecture + design

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Type of project: Renovation

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Total cost: \$2,500,000

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Service population: 13,551

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Library director: Sandy Whitmer

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## What people are saying:

"I love how bright and welcoming the library is. The new renovation really shows off the collections."

"I love the children's area! My grandchildren love to visit my library and that makes me very happy!"

"I like the new teen lounge and all the new study/reading rooms."



Photo credits: McShane Fleming Studios

# Serving Autistic Library Users: Fostering Inclusion While Meeting Individual Needs

**D**espite individual librarians' differences in perspectives and experiences, librarianship, as a whole, can be considered a progressive profession, dedicated to improving not just services for the core group of patrons, but access to information for all members of society. One group that has the potential to benefit the most from these efforts are differently abled individuals and their families. Autism (formally referred to as Autism Spectrum Disorder, or ASD) is one of those conditions that presents libraries with unique challenges in ensuring their services are as equitable as possible.

## OVERCOMING MISPERCEPTIONS

As well-meaning as many librarians are, especially in their public-service mindset, preconceived notions about certain user groups can cloud judgment and hinder delivery of the best possible level of service to that group. This can be especially true in the case of autism, since some librarians may not have much, if any, first-hand experience interacting with autistic individuals. One common misperception, stemming from popular culture (including the movie *Rain Man*), is that all autistic individuals are "savants," or possess unusual or extraordinary intellectual abilities. Conversely, some people may view autism as always including intellectual challenges, while in reality, people who experience behavioral difficulties function across a wide range of intellectual ability.

Another common misperception regarding autistic individuals and their abilities is that all autistic individuals are pretty much alike in the challenges they face, and so there is a "one-size-fits-all" approach that libraries can take in meeting their needs. The reality is quite different, however. For instance, the range of language and communication skills among autistic individuals can vary widely. Some autistic individuals have excellent language and verbal skills, while others are more non-verbal and need assistance in communicating. Even among non-verbal autistic individuals, the means by which they express themselves vary significantly. Some use an assistive augmentative communication device, such as a picture exchange communication system (utilizing cards with images on them to convey multiple ideas, including full sentences) or a digital software program that is on their phone or tablet. Other autistic individuals employ sign language to communicate.

With a very broad (and often vague) notion of what autism is, and what challenges autistic individuals face, it can be difficult to take concrete steps to make the library environment as welcoming as possible. For example, making it clear what services the library offers, including providing adequate signage, is something that libraries might overlook. It is easy to fall into that "one-size-fits-all" trap, especially when serving a large and diverse patron group in which it may seem daunting to try meeting the individual needs of all library users, autistic and non-autistic. More significantly, library staff who do not know what to expect from autistic users can often misinterpret behavior, such as having a meltdown, as "dangerous" and requiring some sort of disciplinary action. In addition to prompting overreaction on the part of library staff, such a situation can make using the library even more frustrating and frightening for autistic individuals and their families, potentially discouraging them from using the library in the future.



Another widespread misperception is that the information needs of autistic individuals are different from those of other patrons. This can hinder the entire interaction between librarian and patron, to the point that the autistic individual does not achieve his or her goal in using the library. Even though communicating with an autistic patron may present more of a challenge, and it may take longer to ascertain the person's specific information needs, the librarian's mission remains the same: providing the best service possible and giving the patron a reason to return to the library.

## GETTING IN THE DOOR

For many patrons, challenges with accessing the library include transportation, conflict with work hours or childcare commitments, and other obstacles. Once they reach the library itself, however, navigating the collection and other services is relatively straightforward, particularly when a library staff member has pointed them in the right direction. For autistic individuals and their families, however, making it into the library and knowing their way around is not enough to ensure a positive and productive experience. Much of the fear can stem from feeling socially marginalized, and even ostracized, on a broader level, because of being "different." Furthermore, autistic users also need to feel as if they are part of the library community and its services, and are not merely present in the building.

Thus, creating a welcoming physical environment is a critical first step. Although there is a perception that libraries are "quiet spaces," anyone who has visited one knows that noise levels can vary drastically, depending on the area of the library and the time of day. Having a space in which a patron can calm down, if necessary, and refocus is important. At the same time, library staff members need to be aware that some parents of autistic individuals may fear they will be asked to leave if their children make too much noise or are disruptive in some other way. Thus, overcoming the notion that the library is solely a "quiet space" is crucial.

Another issue related to the physical environment is sensory-processing difficulties. The amount of sensory input that certain autistic individuals can manage varies. For some, "over-stimulation" is an issue. In library environments, fluorescent lights can be particularly problematic, due to buzzing and flickering that may go unnoticed by non-autistic patrons. Background noise can be another distraction, especially if there is a loud activity occurring in a particular part of the library; an autistic patron may feel the need to move to an area of the library where there are fewer distractions. In the case of children's activities, or even group activities for adults, too much tactile stimulation, such as in crafts or other hands-on projects, can create difficulties. For other autistic individuals, however, lack of stimulation is the problem, as they need more sensory input than the average person does. For instance, they may need to touch objects, walk back and forth, or perform other physical actions.

[continued on page 20]

Beyond the physical environment, the social one is another area in which autistic individuals may not feel comfortable. For younger children and their parents, participating in a group activity may be awkward because of concerns that the child will act oddly or have a meltdown, due to stress from social stimulation. Older children, who are more aware of how their autism makes them “different,” may voluntarily choose not to participate. Adults may be hesitant to ask for help, due to uncertainty over how to express their needs clearly. Even if an autistic patron is comfortable in expressing her or his needs, frustration will mount if staff members are unfamiliar with non-verbal communication, including sign language, that an autistic individual might use.

Executive function and self-regulation are two other challenges that can affect autistic individuals’ social interactions. Essentially, executive function and self-regulation help people plan, prioritize, and complete tasks, while controlling their impulses and emotions. Autistic patrons who struggle with this may arrive late to an activity, not be well prepared or remember specific instructions, and not prioritize tasks well enough to complete an assignment or activity in a timely manner. In an academic setting, with students facing a number of time-consuming tasks in studying for tests and writing papers, interpreting instructions correctly and following directions can be especially frustrating.

Colleges and universities, especially large public ones, can face additional challenges in making their libraries welcoming, as the campus itself can be a confusing place, and new students are often away from home for the first time. If a campus has multiple library locations, for instance, and the administrative structure gives each library independence (especially for departmental libraries, such as history or biology), a change that is implemented in one library may not be enforced at a different one, even though the same autistic patron or patrons may use both libraries. Also, particularly on older campuses with many libraries that were built before the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) went into effect, the physical space may vary depending on the location, and a strategy that might work in one setting may not be as effective in another one.

Regardless of how welcoming a library’s physical and social environment might seem, an autistic individual will still face significant frustration if he or she cannot read the library’s materials. Also, for those autistic patrons who are visiting a library for the first time, it can be an especially unnerving experience, even if the library has already taken steps to create an “autism-friendly” environment. This is especially true if a library is large or difficult to find one’s way around in, and there is not clear signage. A child who is visiting the library for the first time may feel particularly unnerved, as any new experience can seem overwhelming.

## MAKING THE ENVIRONMENT MORE WELCOMING

Even though each library may have its own specific resources and challenges in addressing the needs of autistic patrons, there are a few steps that all libraries can take as a starting point to meet their mission to make their spaces and services as inclusive as possible. These include addressing any issues relating to noise and lighting, which, as noted above, affect many autistic patrons. Once a library has identified the specific needs of its autistic users and determined what resources are available to build a truly autism-friendly environment, it can then proceed further.

A map of the library, or signage that is color-coded, is a good first step. To prepare children to visit the library for the first time, staff might want to create a “social story,” which can explain basic information about the library in a clear format while using pictures to help convey meaning, and make it available on the website for viewing ahead of the visit. The presentation should also include photos of the different areas or rooms in the library, along with pictures of the staff so that children can become familiar with the people who will be assisting them.

Noise-cancelling headphones are an easy and cheap way for libraries to give autistic individuals a method of avoiding distractions. In the case of hands-on activities, providing latex-free gloves or other hand coverings can help patrons feel more comfortable and, at the same time, ensure that they can be part of the group and feel as if they belong socially. For patrons who need stimulation, small fidgets can help calm them and enable them to concentrate. Other sensory items, such as special seating, weighted lap pads, or small blankets with different types of fabrics, can aid in providing a more positive and productive library experience. For patrons who struggle with executive functioning, reminders such as calendars, timers, and checklists can help them stay on task and reach an objective.

In an academic library, particularly on a large campus, coordination among the different library locations, and between librarians and other departments that play a role in administering the libraries, is crucial. Bringing in parties from outside the library introduces knowledge and perspectives to the discussion that librarians might lack. Conducting walk-throughs of the different libraries on campus can help librarians and outsiders become more familiar with the specific challenges each location faces in making its space and services as welcoming as possible to autistic students.

Through all of these initiatives and steps, it might be helpful for a library to consider how improving services for autistic patrons fits into the broader goal of making libraries more accessible and friendly for differently abled users in general. Serving the needs of all users, including differently abled ones, is a major underlying principle of the American Library Association, articulated in its Library Bill of Rights. Regardless of library type, size, or location, it is likely that multiple users will visit who are differently abled and may face significantly varying challenges in navigating the library space. The ADA has led to substantial improvements in public accommodations for differently abled individuals, including making library buildings more physically accessible. One challenge in recognizing the needs of autistic patrons is that it can often be a “hidden” condition, and the steps a library needs to take may not be as obvious as those for accommodating patrons in wheelchairs, for instance. Studying ADA guidelines and considering universal design (a method of making public spaces, including libraries, as accessible to as many people as possible) are strategies that any library can use to fulfill its mission of serving the full community.

Libraries should also keep in mind that improving services for autistic individuals, and differently abled individuals more broadly, is part of the overall customer-service ethos. Many changes, such as clearer directions and maps in the library, will create a more welcoming environment and positive user experience for all patrons, regardless of any specific challenges an individual patron might face. One issue libraries that are part of schools, universities, or other larger organizations face is that they are not always included in disability training for the institution as a whole. Similarly, MLIS degree programs and other pre-professional training, do not always include courses or other resources focused on serving differently abled users.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Even though there is still much work to be done in raising awareness of autism and ensuring that libraries meet the needs of autistic individuals and their families, progress is noticeable. As recently as 2008, there were no significant regional programs or models for making libraries “autism-friendly,” and there was very little professional literature on the subject. At the 2011 ALA Annual Conference in New Orleans, however, there were seven individual sessions covering programs for autistic patrons, and a preconference program at the 2012 Public Library Association Conference focused specifically on meeting the needs of autistic individuals. Even with the growth of the programs mentioned above, however, ensuring that libraries provide the best service possible to autistic individuals in the long-term will rest on the education, experimentation, and feedback that libraries and their autistic patrons share. As the groups work together, they can help libraries continue to meet, as fully as possible, their goal of providing excellent service to every user who walks in the door. 

## Keeping Up with the Latest Approaches

With the many misperceptions concerning autistic individuals, the challenges they face, and what services libraries should provide to create a welcoming environment, how can libraries ensure they are as autism-friendly as possible? Regardless of the library type, the broader community it serves, or the number of differently abled individuals who come in the door, educating staff members by making them aware of the latest techniques and strategies is critical. Raising awareness of what autism is (and is not), what challenges autistic individuals and their families face in using libraries, and how libraries can adapt to meet the specific needs of their autistic users, are key first steps. Beyond increasing staff’s knowledge of the available resources, however, what concrete initiatives can libraries undertake to make their environments more welcoming to autistic individuals and their families?

- The Illinois State Library's Targeting Autism Forum provides in-person and virtual training to give librarians the knowledge to begin implementing services for autistic patrons. Visit <http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/library/libraries/targeting-autism.html>.
- Project ENABLE, funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, produced the first general training for librarians that focused specifically on services for differently abled patrons. A Project ENABLE module that focuses specifically on autism will launch in spring 2018. Visit <https://projectenable.syr.edu>.
- The Autism Welcome Here grant program, part of the Libraries and Autism: We're Connected initiative, provides libraries with funding to improve their services for autistic users. Visit <http://www.librariesandautism.org/index.htm>.
- Eastern Illinois University's STEP (Students with Autism Transitional Education Program) helps make the on-campus Booth Library as accommodating as possible to autistic students. Visit <http://www.eiu.edu/step/>.
- JJ Pionke, of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, has created a set of library guides that cover autism and other conditions. [http://guides.library.illinois.edu/prf.php?account\\_id=57164](http://guides.library.illinois.edu/prf.php?account_id=57164)
- Dr. Amelia Anderson, of Florida State University, is putting together a website that focuses specifically on meeting the needs of autistic individuals in academic libraries, part of an IMLS-funded initiative called Project A+. Visit <http://aplus.cci.fsu.edu>.

# Diversity Study Task Force Report and Recommendations

**I**n December 2016, the ILA Executive Board convened a Diversity Study Task Force, charged with “studying the diversity of Illinois library professionals and presenting recommendations to the ILA Board on how ILA can assist in improving the recruitment and retention of diverse library professionals.” Chaired by Executive Board members Richard Kong and Sarah Armstrong, the Task Force collected data through two surveys and a series of roundtable conversations. Members of the Task Force were Katrina Belogorsky, Vandella Brown, Trixie Dantis, Jody Gray, Keisha Hester, Shala Khan, Kate Marek, Elizabeth Marszalik, and Miguel Ruiz. Survey respondents included 12 Spectrum Scholars and 53 members of the Illinois library community; members of underrepresented groups were the intended respondents to the latter survey. Approximately 35 people participated in the roundtable conversations during the ILA Annual Conference in Tinley Park.

The lack of diversity in the library profession is long-standing and well documented; despite numerous well-meaning attempts, including ALA’s Spectrum Scholarship program, which is supported by most ALA-accredited schools of library and information science, the problem persists. Data from the two in-state ALA-accredited graduate programs’ most recent accreditation program presentations say it all: At Dominican, the student population was 80 percent White as of the 2015 report; at UIUC, 82 percent as of the 2011 report. It is ILA’s goal to prioritize and act on some of the Task Force’s recommendations, ideally with measurable outcomes, in order to “move the needle” on increasing and improving equity, diversity, and inclusion in our profession and in our association. ILA will need to identify success measures in order to benchmark any progress we are able to make.

As the Executive Board embarks on a process to update ILA’s strategic plan, the data and recommendations from the Diversity Study Task Force will provide an important input. But we don’t have to wait for a new strategic plan to take action; Vernā Myers, Opening General Session speaker at the 2017 Annual Conference, directly addressed implicit bias and how to deal with it in a high-energy, engaging, and meaningful session that can serve as our inspiration going forward. Around the same time as the convening of the Diversity Study Task Force, ILA released its “Statement on Inclusion.” The array of conference speakers and topics shows an increasing level of diversity, as do the illustrations featured in our iREAD materials. Funding is being sought to continue and improve the Sylvia Murphy Williams Award to enable Illinois Spectrum Scholars to attend ILA Annual Conference. These are small steps toward a larger goal.

“The lack of diversity in the library profession is long-standing and well documented; despite numerous well-meaning attempts.”



The recommendations from the Task Force are listed below. The ILA Executive Board will consider them all as we look ahead to developing strategic directions and tactics in the months to come.

### **Building a Community**

- Expand networking opportunities targeted to members of underrepresented groups, including online conversations and regional meetings, to cultivate organic relationships;
- Facilitate community building for members of underrepresented groups, especially ones starting their career, either online or in person, across levels of experience and tenures within libraries;
- Commit to cultural competency training for all members of ILA, including library workers and trustees.
- Create subgroups within existing ILA groups specifically for mentoring purposes;
- Include different minority caucuses at ILA booths to increase visibility; and
- Seek out diverse speakers for conferences and regional events, particularly if they are from a small library or not otherwise connected to other libraries.

### **Expanding Financial Support**

- Increase the number of available travel grants to allow library workers to attend ILA conferences and other continuing education opportunities;
- Provide additional information regarding how to present a case to library administration for attending conference and other professional events.

### **Increasing Awareness of Career Opportunities**

- Advertise librarianship as a profession among traditionally underrepresented groups;
- Encourage librarians to discuss the profession of librarianship with paraprofessionals, student workers, interns, volunteers, and patrons; and
- Develop a library school toolkit for programs and paths to librarianship, which should advance beyond recruitment and support students during their degree-seeking years.

**ILA**

# Defining the Library's Brand in Schaumburg

It's no secret the needs of library patrons have shifted over the last decade. And libraries are doing a phenomenal job recognizing these changes and adapting, finding ways to remain relevant within their communities. At Schaumburg Township District Library, we've kept up with the trends, providing our patrons with resources and services they want and need. Like so many others, we've modernized our library, offering 3D printing, coding programs, access to digital resources from home and so much more. But our brand simply did not communicate this. Our logo and visual and written styles still felt traditional. It was time for a change. It was time to refresh our brand.

We started by hiring a freelance graphic designer—someone who could come in with fresh eyes and show us a new perspective. Although there are plenty of services available to help businesses identify freelancers, we decided to choose from designers our team members had successfully worked with in the past. We reviewed their portfolios to ensure they could handle the project and selected the designer whose style seemed to best match our vision. We gave our freelance designer a bit of history so she could understand some of the challenges we faced with our logo and style. More importantly, we talked to her about who we serve, our values, the values of our community and the services we provide as a modern library. The information our designer appreciated the most was a list of adjectives we used to describe

what our brand should communicate to the world about our organization—we are innovative, honest, professional, reliable, friendly, and helpful. Our designer created a few different options for us, and over the next four months we had conversations with our board and staff, adjusting and tweaking until we finally had our new logo.

When we started this process, we were ready to throw out our old logo entirely—it had served us well for many years, but it was time for something new. In the end, we retained an element of the old logo; giving a nod to our history and making our new logo feel fresh but familiar. While perfecting the logo, we also worked with our designer to set primary and secondary color palettes; fonts for headlines and text; and additional guidelines for our visual style, such as use of shadows, outlines, gradients, and stock imagery.

We also worked internally to define our written style, addressing simple areas such as how we format dates and times, and more nuanced ones such as setting a standard for the tone we use in written communication. Those same adjectives we used to describe our brand overall applied to our written communication style. To us, that meant a slightly more casual tone than what we've used in the past, using active voice, and a more personal feel overall—addressing patrons directly and referring to our organization in plural first person rather than third person.

## BEFORE



**Schaumburg Township  
District Library**

## AFTER



SCHAUMBURG  
TOWNSHIP DISTRICT  
**LIBRARY**



“The information our designer appreciated the most was a list of adjectives we used to describe what our brand should communicate to the world about our organization.”

A brand is more than a logo—it’s all these elements working together. For Schaumburg Township District Library, our visual and written style shows our patrons and community who we are and what we stand for, without us having to state it outright. So, we’ve refreshed our logo and defined our visual and written style. But what good is this beautiful new brand if we don’t use it with consistency?

Our final step in working with our graphic designer was to create a set of templates that would help us implement our new brand in all our marketing and communications. She made templates for our posters, flyers, letterhead, business cards, and possibly the biggest challenge, for our Guide—a 20-page booklet, including more than 150 programs and articles about our services and patrons, mailed to our residents every other month.

Now it was up to us to not only use these templates for all communications moving forward, but to review all the materials we used throughout our buildings and update them to use the new style. We decided to let the brand settle for a little while—use it on newly created materials and uncover the instances where something didn’t quite work. This allowed us to make some additional small tweaks to make the brand a true fit across all areas of marketing and communication for our library.

Finally, the moment arrived: we had to completely eliminate the old logo and brand. We’re a big organization with a lot of printed material, so this was no small feat. To really do this right, we reviewed each item, decided if it was something we still used and needed, ensured the content was relevant and accurate, then redesigned each item to fit our new brand.

It’s been nearly two years since we refreshed our brand and there’s still work to be done. We’re committed to our new brand and making sure it encompasses all areas of our organization, from micro-copy on our website to directional signage within our buildings. But we’re also committed to doing it right, which often takes time and patience. ■■

# Virtual Reference: Bridging the Divide Between In-Person and Digital Assistance in Academic Libraries

**W**hen it comes to delivering high-quality library services, face-to-face interactions still have great value, in both answering questions and establishing trust between the librarian and the questioner. This may prove especially true for reference transactions, which require additional questioning and follow-up by the librarian to determine how best to meet student users' needs. That having been said, one of the realities of twenty-first-century librarianship is that more users are gravitating toward virtual-reference services, including chat, as a means of having their questions answered. For some patrons, choosing virtual reference over an in-person visit is a matter of convenience, due to work, classes, or other obligations.

Regardless of the student's reason for using virtual reference, the librarian need not sacrifice the helpfulness and commitment that mark the face-to-face transaction. This is not to downplay the many challenges, technical or otherwise, that virtual reference often presents. But, if libraries follow particular steps and remain open to adjustments as needed, they can make a smooth transition to virtual reference and, in the process, reach more users while maintaining the heart of the reference transaction.

## TAKING THE PLUNGE

The reasons for adding, or expanding, a virtual-reference service can vary widely, depending on specific institutional needs. David Stern, Library Director at Saint Xavier University in Chicago, decided to move to virtual desktop sharing in order to answer questions from students in a large online nursing program. This helped overcome some of the limitations of using only a chat service. In other cases, the decision to add virtual reference can be part of an overall website revamp. Cynthia Snyder, Reference and Instruction Services Manager at Midwestern University in Downers Grove, discovered that websites of many other libraries already included a chat feature, and Midwestern decided to follow suit. In the case of Rasmussen College, adding virtual reference became an absolute necessity, said Emily Gilbert, Health Sciences Librarian, as the library moved to a fully digital service model. The move to virtual reference complemented the other changes the library was making, including transitioning the collection to an entirely digital format.

[continued on page 28]



## MAKING THE MOST OF THE VIRTUAL-REFERENCE EXPERIENCE FOR BOTH THE USER AND THE LIBRARIAN

Face-to-face reference can be challenging enough, but with virtual reference a whole new set of issues arises, and not just technical ones. Communicating via text only (“two-dimensional communication,” so to speak) forces the librarian to be extremely clear and precise in conveying information to the student. Possessing strong reference interview skills is vital, especially for determining exactly what information the user needs. While walking students through database usage, it can help to point to different parts of the screen, if possible, especially if students are unfamiliar with the particular database or database use in general (please see sidebar). In some instances, teaching broader information-literacy skills, so that students can conduct additional research on their own, simply is not possible within the time constraints. Due to the fast-paced nature of virtual reference, students may make spelling or grammatical errors that further muddle the meaning of what they are trying to convey.

Actively engaging with students, and not just delivering an answer, is vital to a successful virtual-reference transaction. Librarians need to respond to questions quickly, as students will often disconnect from the service if they do not receive a reply right away. (This is especially true if there is no queuing service, and staff have to reply to multiple questions at once; or if technical issues cause the librarian and the student to become temporarily disconnected.) Staff should also thank students for using the service and ask for their feedback; this will not only make students feel as if their time using virtual reference was worthwhile, but also encourage them to use the service again and perhaps even recommend it to their classmates and friends.

In entering a virtual-reference session, librarians need to keep an open mind, particularly if students express frustrations that may or may not have any relation to the quality of the service itself. Sometimes, students will expect a single chat session to meet all of their research needs, even for an in-depth question or a lengthy research topic. At the same time, librarians should avoid “information overload,” in particular by not sending students a large number of source links in one session. Scheduling a follow-up session, if necessary, is a more effective approach. Librarians can give students several options, including email, phone, or another method, for continuing the transaction. Students who could be already facing outside problems of some kind (grades, social life, homesickness, etc.) when entering the virtual-reference session may take it out on the librarian. Some students may come to the service with a question that is not even related to the library (i.e., financial aid), forcing librarians to make it clear what the scope of the service is, while referring the student to the appropriate staff member on campus.

## PREPARING STAFF MEMBERS, TROUBLESHOOTING, AND PROMOTION

Depending on the institution, the hours the service is offered, and the amount of use it receives, staffing virtual reference services adequately can present a challenge. This can be especially difficult if students tend to use the service at times, such as weekends and nights, when fewer library staff members are available to monitor it. When setting up a staff schedule, managers need to make certain that the librarians responsible for covering the sessions are held accountable if they miss an assigned shift. This creates interruptions in service that can give users a negative impression, especially if they have had little or no previous experience using the service. If possible, have at least some staff be on chat the entire time they are working. Staffing doesn't need to be limited to “traditional” reference librarians—managers can and should be willing to include staff from other departments, particularly public-services-related ones.

If a librarian cannot answer a particular question, there should be a system in place for handing it off to the right person. Some questions may not be strictly reference—they could cover other library-related topics, such as interlibrary loan requests or overdue book renewals. Also, community members or students from outside the institution may end up using the service, either intentionally or by mistake, creating additional work for librarians answering questions and potentially impeding the fastest-possible service from being provided to the institution's own patrons. Often, it is not possible to restrict who logs on to the service. To manage this problem, libraries need to set clear guidelines for who the primary users of the chat service should be.

Even with constant preparation and maintenance, technical issues do arise. If a chat service, for instance, is hosted externally (such as LibChat via Springshare), and the host experiences a breakdown, then the library should have a backup plan in place to keep the lines of communication open. Another major technical limitation is that only so much information can be posted via a screen, and, for some services, screen sharing is not possible.

Regardless of how helpful students who do use the service find it, or how popular it already seems to be, promoting it is critical if the service is to reach as many students as possible. Visibility of the widget and the hours on the website is crucial. There are a variety of locations beyond just the library homepage (the institution's website, LibGuides, databases, etc.) where students might discover the service. Similarly, parties outside of the library, such as faculty members and student advisors, who have a stake in library resources, need to become aware of the service.

## PLANNING AHEAD TO ENSURE LONG-TERM SUCCESS

Regardless of the potential advantages and drawbacks of a virtual-reference service, any library considering implementing or upgrading one should think carefully, due to the significant investment of time, staff, and funding that a virtual-reference service often entails. Take the time to experiment with the various tools that are available. Even after choosing one, make certain that staff have plenty of opportunities to become comfortable with using the technology. Have as specific as possible an idea of what goals the virtual-reference service will meet.

Thinking in the long term is also vital. Start small and, then, depending on the amount of use the service receives, expand it. Don't expect immediate success—it might take time for students to become aware of, and comfortable using, the service. Based on feedback and other information, be willing to adjust the scope and scale of the service, particularly the hours it is staffed. Before making changes, review data and statistics. Make certain to train staff on any changes, including technical ones, and, more important, be very clear on the expectations for all staff in answering questions. Even if there are no technical changes, refresher courses are always helpful to ensure continued high levels of service. Review transcripts of sessions so that consistency in answering questions can be ensured. Most importantly, seek feedback, not just from the chat users at one's own institution, but also from other institutions that have a similar service.

Despite the challenges associated with adopting, maintaining, or expanding a virtual-reference service, the reward can be great. In some instances, the number of reference questions a library receives can increase drastically, even doubling, or outpacing all other types of transactions (in-person, phone, email, etc.) combined. Patrons who may not have used, or even been aware of, the library's services previously are now actively engaged with it. The service can not only demonstrate that a library is capable of providing "twenty-first-century services," but also that it can play a vital role in the overall success of an academic institution. **ILA**

## Sharing Your Screen

Several free options for screen-sharing technology are available. Google Hangouts (<https://hangouts.google.com/>) allows interactive collaboration and conferencing, along with installable applications. A disadvantage of Google Hangouts is that all users must have Google accounts to access it at the same time. While this should not be an issue for users at the same institution who share an account, it may limit access by users from other organizations. Join.me (<https://www.join.me/>) gives multiple users the ability to communicate via audio or videoconferencing, in addition to screen sharing. Purchasing extended service adds remote training and reference. Screenleap (<https://www.screenleap.com/>) enables users to share screens for 1-2 hours per day. Buying extended service gives one audio conferencing and allows for longer use and more viewers, although chat is not available. For both Join.me and Screenleap, participants other than the host do not need to download any software to participate. Which option works best depends on an institution's needs and how comfortable staff members are with the technology.

### Sources

Stern, David. "Providing Effective Service at a Distance," *Information Outlook* (the Special Libraries Association journal), 20(5) (September/October 2016): 15, 20.

Stern, David. "Virtual Reference and In-depth Assistance Using Shared Workspaces," *Online Searcher* 37 (1) (January/February 2013): 22–26 .



# Our First Maker Fest: A Small Library's Success Story in River Forest

**O**n Saturday, October 7, the River Forest Public Library (RFPL) hosted its first Maker Fest. Our library is small, with 14,400 square feet and a service population of 11,172. Because the most avid library users in our community are senior citizens and parents, we were initially uncertain whether the amount of community interest in such an event would warrant its significant time investment (about 13 months). What we learned from the positive feedback we received and high turnout is that there is a strong desire in the River Forest community to learn about robotics, drones, and 3D printers, as well as more traditional art media such as mosaics. In all, we hosted 11 exhibitors and more than 275 participants, ranging from senior citizens to children as young as three.

## HOW IT ALL STARTED

Our Maker Fest journey began with an idea from a local Boy Scout. He approached us with a pitch to help create a permanent makerspace inside RFPL as fulfillment of the community service requirement for his Eagle Scout Badge. Our lack of adequate space, or adequate staffing unfortunately ruled out the permanent makerspace idea. However, after researching other libraries' engagement with the maker concept, we proposed an alternative project idea: partnership with RFPL to coordinate and stage an all-day, library-wide Maker Fest. Hosting the Fest was a great

alternative because we didn't need to make investments in expensive permanent equipment and ongoing staff training, and we could customize the event to fit our space. The Maker Fest also gave RFPL a welcome opportunity to provide mentorship and a crash course in library operations (and project management) to a high school student, and demonstrated our dedication as a community partner to local organizations.

## GOALS, PLANNING, AND FACILITATION

Two of our RFPL's strategic goals are to promote lifelong learning and stimulate imagination. We realized in planning this event that we have always hosted maker-related programs geared toward all ages in pursuit of these goals—we just hadn't yet attached the trendy label "maker" to them! Our robust twice-weekly after-school program, Connections, teaches middle school students fine motor skills while exercising their imaginations in designing take away projects. We offer an array of experiential learning activities, both passive and structured, for young children. And, our adults have shown up in droves for programs such as floral arrangement and cake decorating. Through the summer and fall of 2017, we rebranded and highlighted these programs as "maker" programs in our quarterly newsletter and other promotions, and threw in a few more creative programs than usual to get our adults into the maker spirit.

[continued on page 32]



RFPL MAKER  
FEST 2017



RFPL MAKER  
FEST 2017



Aside from assisting our local Boy Scout with his Eagle Scout requirements, we had some internal goals in mind. One of our goals was to include exhibitors with cross-generational appeal. We also wanted to bring in hands-on activities and fascinating displays from which people of all ages could learn. To identify potential exhibitors, we solicited word-of-mouth recommendations from staff, sponsors, partner organizations, and patrons. After we designed a detailed, professional application form, we directly invited 25 local organizations and businesses to apply by phone and email. Pitching the Fest in just the right way to generate interest to a variety of organizations, playing “phone tag” with the smaller, harder-to-reach vendors, and trying to determine which organizations would yield the best table demos and activities for our event took up a significant amount of staff time and effort. Now that we have a better sense of some core organizations that are truly interested, though, we anticipate that this task will not take quite as much time if we rerun the Fest. Ultimately, we hosted a great lineup of motivated, exciting local exhibitors: 2DKits, ChiBots, Creative 3D Technologies, DePaul University Library, iD Tech, Judy Steed Mosaics, Oak Park Art League, School of Rock (Oak Park), South Side Hackerspace, Tapster Robotics, and Workshop 88. Eleven tables were just enough to comfortably yet bustlingly fit in our small space without disrupting ordinary library operations.

Another goal was to keep the program simple and to make sure the exhibitors, library staff, and guests were happy. With this in mind we did the following:

- We kept the hours reasonable. The program ran from 10 AM to 3 PM. The library is open on Saturdays from 9 AM to 5 PM, which gave our staff and the Boy Scout troop volunteers plenty of time to set up and take down between 8 and 5.
- We fed everyone. We felt it was important to provide sustenance to help our exhibitors, staff, and corps of Boy Scout volunteers get through an active day. We set up a platter of sandwiches in a downstairs office, and offered coverage at the exhibitors’ tables while they ran downstairs to grab a plate. Providing food also enabled our vendors to remain in the building the entire day.
- We created an incentive for every guest to visit each station. We offered a passport pamphlet along with a quick explanation of the event to every patron that walked through the library’s doors from our welcome table. At each station the guests visited, they received a stamp for their passport. If they collected all 11 stamps, they could pick up a small take-home prize (a 3-in-1 stylus pen with our logo, a touchscreen cleaner on one end, and a touchscreen stylus at the other end), and a raffle ticket for a chance to win one of four grand prizes.
- We offered a well-structured experience for exhibitors, volunteers, and guests alike. Our passports also served as maps, giving our guests a sense of direction and accomplishment. We provided a schedule of events and descriptions of tasks to all vendors, staff, and volunteers, so people knew exactly what their duties were and how to carry them out. And of course, when to break for lunch!

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## PROMOTION

One of the first things we did to promote this event was create a Maker Fest logo. Using it in our quarterly newsletter and other promotional items in the months leading up to the event gave our Maker Fest brand recognition and built buzz long before it actually took place. About two months prior to the Fest, we distributed posters advertising our exhibitors’ participation to area businesses, libraries, universities, and service organizations, especially those for youth. This created cachet for our exhibitors as community partners while also drawing attention to our event. We posted the event on RAILS to increase awareness of our Fest within the wider library community. The local Boy Scout we worked with spread the word and passed out flyers to local schools’ robotics and arts- and science-related clubs, and to science/technology departments. We sent out press releases to local newspapers, two of which interviewed both us and the Boy Scout. These articles were published about one week before the Fest.

## COST

Our budget was \$1000, but the total cost of the Fest was \$800, plus staff time. The majority of staff time for this event was spent communicating with vendors and helping oversee our partner's Eagle Scout project. The majority of the costs went to food, materials for promotional buttons we made ourselves, door prizes, and grand prizes for four raffles. The raffle prizes we purchased included a Makey Makey Go kit; a helicopter drone; a DIY drone book; and a LEGO architecture kit featuring buildings of downtown Chicago. The School of Rock, a popular Oak Park music school, took us up on the opportunity to sponsor a raffle prize, generously donating a month of tuition with a value of about \$350.

As it turns out, it doesn't cost a fortune to put on a great event! If we do decide to run the Maker Fest again, we would need to budget only \$500–\$600. It would be possible to rerun a bare bones version of this year's Fest without food and with a less robust prize structure for only about \$300, plus staff time. While we enjoyed the opportunity to work with the Boy Scout and his family, running the program with RFPL staff alone would save staff costs as well.

## RESULTS

Our first-ever Maker Fest gave us a meaningful reason to engage with local businesses, schools, and service organizations, as well as help a local young person realize his goal of earning an Eagle Scout badge. The Fest served as an advocacy vehicle to showcase how RFPL achieves its strategic goals, as well as demonstrating our innovation in providing interactive, tech-forward activities that appeal to all facets of our community. The Fest provided guests with a safe space to explore and ask questions about how robots and 3D printers work, how to create circuit breakers, to touch and try musical instruments and dabble in mosaic making, and other fun activities to which they may otherwise not have had access. 🎨



# ANNOUNCEMENTS

## ILA Candidates for 2018

The ILA Nominating Committee has announced the candidates for election in the spring of 2018.

### PRESIDENT-ELECT CANDIDATES

(three-year term beginning July 1, 2018–June 30, 2021)

**Cathy Mayer**, Trinity Christian College, Palos Heights

**Molly Beestrum**, Columbia College, Chicago

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

(three-year term beginning July 1, 2018–June 30, 2021)

A candidate from each pairing will be elected in accordance with the ILA bylaws as amended at the 1998 ILA Annual Conference; a total of four directors will be elected to serve three-year terms on the ILA Executive Board.

### DIRECTOR AT LARGE:

**Diana Brawley Sussman**, Carbondale Public Library System

**Rick Meyer**, Decatur Public Library

### DIRECTOR AT LARGE:

**Tim Jarzemsky**, Bloomingdale Public Library

**Michelle Petersen**, Plainfield Public Library

### DIRECTOR AT LARGE:

**Larissa Garcia**, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb

**Jennifer Jackson**, University of Illinois Chicago

### DIRECTOR AT LARGE:

**Deanne Guccione**, Pleasant Plains Middle School, CUSD #8,  
Pleasant Plains

**Janine Asmus**, Leyden High School District #212, Franklin Park

### ALA COUNCILOR:

**Jeannie Dilger**, Palatine Public Library

**Steve Brantley**, Eastern Illinois University, Charleston

Any ILA member wishing to be added to the ballot by petition shall be added to the slate and placed in the paired candidate group that most clearly matches the affiliations of the petitioner as determined by the nominating committee. Petition candidates for vice president/president-elect will be added to the presidential slate as requested. The polls will open electronically April 1, 2018. In addition, paper ballots will be sent to persons requesting one. The return deadline is thirty days after the ballot is postmarked. The electronic polls will close April 30.

Serving on the nominating committee are Pattie Piotrowski (chair), Beth Duttlinger, Tamara J. Kuhn-Schnell, Carl Lehnen, Rob Morrison, Christina Stoll, and Denise M. Zielinski.



# ILA Welcomes New Members

We would love to welcome your friends and colleagues, too. By sponsoring a new member, you share the benefits of membership with others ... and help create a stronger and more effective voice to promote the highest quality library services for all people in Illinois.

## PERSONAL MEMBERS

**Matthew Banaszynski**, Melzer Elementary, Morton Grove  
**Andrea Cox**, Lisle Library District  
**Mosi Kamau**, Chicago Public Library  
**Mark Kimmel**, Bethesda, MD  
**Cathy Mayer**, Trinity Christian College Library, Palos Heights  
**Alison Slyman**, Naperville  
**Alie Stansbury**, Nippersink Public Library District, Richmond

## TRUSTEE MEMBERS

**Denise Curran**, Sandwich Public Library District  
**Denise Devereux-Peters**, Barrington Area Library  
**George England**, Cary Area Public Library  
**Ruth Fish**, Sandwich Public Library District  
**Denise Ii**, Sandwich Public Library District  
**Martin Scanlon**, Evergreen Park Public Library  
**Denise Tenyer**, Barrington Area Library

## CO-MEMBERS

**Janine Asmus**, Leyden High School District #212, Franklin Park

## STUDENT MEMBERS

**Joel Beverley**, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee School  
of Information Studies  
**Kate Forster**, Joliet  
**Maria Kupper**, Sacred Heart Academy, Louisville, KY  
**Sarah Mitchell-Mace**, Chicago  
**Gennifer Oden**, Eureka Public Library District

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# Making our voices heard in Washington, D.C.

Join ILA's delegation to travel to the nation's capitol and get our message out to Congress! ALA's National Library Legislative Day (NLLD) is a two-day educational event that brings hundreds of librarians, trustees, library supporters, and patrons to Washington, D.C. Illinois has traditionally delivered one of the most robust delegations and we expect to do so again this year.

## **National Library Legislative Day 2018 takes place May 7–8, 2018.**

Monday, May 7

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### **ALA Briefing Day, Liaison Capitol Hill, 415 New Jersey Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001**

This full day (8:00 AM registration; 9:00 AM–3:30 PM program) includes briefings on key issues as well as advocacy training for congressional visits and an opportunity for state delegations to meet.

### **Congressional reception on Capitol Hill (location TBA), 5:30–7:00 PM**

### **Illinois Library Association dinner at the Capitol Hill Club, 300 First St. SE, Washington, DC 20003**

This optional, separately ticketed event offers networking and socializing opportunities for the Illinois delegation and friends. 6:30 cocktails; 7:30 dinner.

Tuesday, May 8

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### **Congressional visits with scheduled appointments from 9:00 A.M.–3:00 P.M.**

## **Registration**

NLLD registration (\$75) is handled through ALA. Illinois librarians will automatically be counted as part of the Illinois delegation. Your registration fee includes legislative materials, Monday's briefing sessions, and Congressional Reception, organized by ALA's National Library Legislative Day Committee; and Tuesday's Congressional visits, organized by ILA. To register, please visit <http://www.ala.org/advocacy/advleg/nlld>

Monday dinner registration (\$50 for ILA members; \$60 for non-members) is handled through ILA. To register, please visit <https://www.ila.org/events/national-library-legislative-day>

## **Housing**

Attendees are responsible for their own hotel reservations. ALA has reserved a block of rooms at the Liaison Capitol Hill (the same location as Monday's briefing events), 415 New Jersey Ave., Washington, DC 20001.

Hotel registration is now open. You can book online (use group name: National Library Legislative Day 2018 and the code ALAMAY to receive the discounted rate) or call toll-free: **1-888-513-7445**.

Please Note: If you are planning on booking nights outside of our room block, you must book the additional nights separately in order to take advantage of the discount.

To receive the discounted rate, please register by April 13, 2018.

# REACHING FORWARD

This Annual Conference  
is for Library Staff in  
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Special Libraries

## Reaching Forward 2018 Friday, May 4, 9:00 AM – 3:30 PM Stephens Convention Center, Rosemont

Join us for the 29th Annual Reaching Forward Conference. This year's conference will feature morning coffee, a plated lunch, and a full day of programming. The popular Performers' Showcase will return, featuring performers for both children and adults.

## Celebrating 29 Years of Excellence!

Our mission is to provide professional opportunities to help library staff grow, learn, and connect with new ideas.

Visit [ReachingForward.net](http://ReachingForward.net)  
to register online and download  
the group registration form.

### Conference Schedule

8:30 – 9:00 AM	Morning Coffee and Exhibits
9:15 – 10:15 AM	Breakout Session 1
10:30 – 11:30 AM	Breakout Session 2
11:45 AM – 12:45 PM	Luncheon and Awards Presentation
12:45 – 1:15 PM	Exhibits Break
1:15 – 2:15 PM	Breakout Session 3
2:30 – 3:30 PM	Breakout Session 4

### Registration

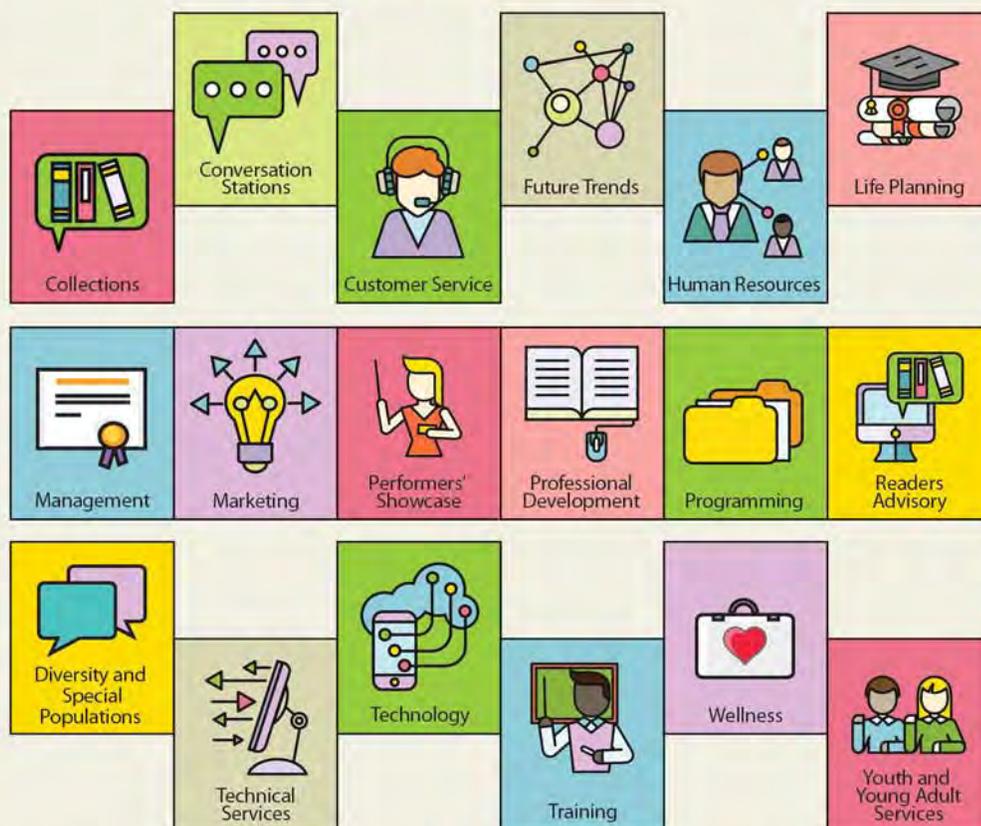
Early Bird (by April 20): \$150  
Advance (April 21 and later): \$165  
(includes morning coffee and lunch)

A full listing of programs and detailed conference information will be available at [ReachingForward.net](http://ReachingForward.net) in February.

### Cancellation Policy

Cancellations must be received in writing before April 20. No refunds will be given after April 20. All cancellations are subject to a \$15 processing fee.

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Register online and download the group registration form at  
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